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Experts say two recent studies could point to a worrisome trend concerning Great Lakes' water supply and demand.

A 2009 Army Corps of Engineers report indicates that Lake Michigan is approximately a full foot below its long-term water level, even when factoring in that levels are cyclical and generally rise in the summer and decrease in the fall or winter.

Additionally, demand for the lake's water continues to increase. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning reports that water demand could increase 64 percent by 2050, largely through anticipated population growth in the region.

Last year's passage of the Great Lakes Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact, which includes a ban on new diversions of water outside the Great Lakes area with limited exceptions, is a good start to protecting the Lakes, said U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th.

Kirk said that if future research finds further drops in water levels, he would support a stiffening of the compact requiring current users to use less Great Lakes water.

"I believe science is the key to develop good policy," he said.

Kirk joined environmental leaders as well as representatives from the planning agency and the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration on Monday at Shedd Aquarium in Chicago to discuss the threats.

Environmental experts say that the icing of the lakes in the winter has historically slowed evaporation.

But new data shows that Lake Michigan ice cover has declined by approximately 30 percent between the winters of 1972/1973 and the winter of 2007/2008.

According to Kirk's office, the congressman will seek to attach an amendment to the fiscal 2010 Commerce, Justice and Science Appropriations Bill calling upon the Oceanic Administration to conduct long-term ice cover and water level outlooks for the Great Lakes and to report on the impact of climate change on the habitats, fish and wildlife, commerce, recreational opportunities and water supply of the Great Lakes basin.

"Our current Great Lakes climate forecasting ability remains very limited," said Kirk. "The Army Corps of Engineers only forecasts water levels six months out, with NOAA using one-year models. While invaluable, this data is not enough to effectively determine systemic changes to our lakes."